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Contact: Bridget Moran, (WSDA) (360) 902-1936
Kate Sandboe (360) 902-1815

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, Washington 98504-2560
Visit our Web site at: agr.wa.gov

Initial results of surface water pesticide monitoring look good

OLYMPIA – A search for pesticides in several salmon-bearing streams has turned up promising results, according to a report released today.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) contracted with the state Department of Ecology to do a three-year study of pesticide residues in salmon-bearing streams. The first year's results were released today. Two index watersheds representing agricultural and urban land-use patterns were chosen for the study. Samples were taken weekly from April through June 2003. In the agricultural watershed, bi-weekly sampling continued through the summer.

Surface water was sampled for 87 registered pesticides. The results showed very little pesticide residue in either watershed.

"This is just the first year's results, but so far the news is good," said Valoria Loveland, WSDA director. "Once we have the results from all three years, we can document trends over time. Having this kind of information will help us make better decisions to protect endangered species while minimizing the economic impact on agriculture."

Thornton Creek in the Cedar-Sammamish watershed was chosen for the urban stream sampling. The agricultural samples came from Spring Creek, Sulphur Creek Wasteway, and Marion Drain in the Lower Yakima Watershed.

No pesticide residue was found in 96 percent of the agricultural and urban stream samples, while the remaining four percent showed minimal or barely detectable levels. Of the 46 pesticides found in the agricultural sampling sites, 2,4-D was the most common chemical. Samples from the urban stream found 17 pesticides. The most common was pentachlorophenol (a wood preservative).

Bridget Moran, manager of WSDA's Endangered Species Program, said the agencies will continue sampling the watersheds for two more years. If they find a significant level of pesticide in a certain area, they will work with growers in the area to modify their practices.

"Our approach would be to use a site-specific, targeted response to correct the problem," Moran said.

At the end of the three-year baseline study, Moran said the two state agencies will assess the need for follow-up monitoring. For more information about the study results, visit the WSDA Web site at <http://agr.wa.gov/PestFert/EnvResources/SWM/default.htm>.

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